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COERCION AND CONCILIATION.

A SERMON,

Preached in Camp, at Centreville, Virginia, by the

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Condensed, by request, into a Tract for the times.

KINGS, ch. XVIII: 19, 20. Thus saith the Great King, the King of Assyria, what confidence is this wherein thou trustest?

Thou sayest, (but they are but vain words,) I have counsel and strength for the war. Now on whom dost thou trust that thou *rebellest* against me?

The public mind is absorbed by one thought. That thought expresses itself in words which we hear every day as we sit by our fire-sides, as we walk by the way, in meetings of the people, and in the halls of legislation. These words are Sovereignty, Allegiance, Rebellion, Coercion, Conciliation, War and Peace. These are no longer the watch-words of Partisans. They suggest questions of vital interest, deeply concerning our duties as Christians and as citizens. Civil government is a divine institution. "The powers that be are ordained of God." He does not prescribe any particular form of government, as Monarchy, Aristocracy, or Democracy. He simply recognises government as a necessity for man and enjoins obedience to it, saying, "let every soul be subject to the Higher Powers." But as civil governments are constantly revolving and appearing in new forms, each claiming to be sovereign and demanding our allegiance, it is sometimes a difficult question which of the rivals is the "higher power" to which we owe obedience. In a complex system of government like the

United States, such questions were inevitable. Accordingly, politicians have, from its foundation, been divided into parties with different theories of the government. The tendency of these parties being to keep the State and central governments within their several orbits, with only occasional departures from them, the system revolved for many years without serious disturbance; but all the time the attraction of gravitation was growing weaker, foreshadowing the catastrophe of Disunion.

It is not surprising that some wise and good men, finding themselves unexpectedly amid the wreck of the fallen fabric, should have perplexed themselves with the questions of sovereignty and allegiance; but when the people of each State, in primary meetings and organized conventions, decided that the general government had, by the abuse of its power, abdicated its authority, the question of allegiance was no longer debateable. By that act, the State became the "higher power," even if it had not always been so, according to the true theory of our government. Our duty as Christians is equally clear upon general principles. The Scriptures, rightly interpreted, give no countenance to the doctrine of passive obedience, now revived by the divines of the North. While the Scriptures recognise government as a divine institution, and enjoin obedience to it as an ordinance of God, they tell us in the same breath that *legitimate* rulers are the "ministers of God" for good and the revengers of wrath upon them that do evil. Hence, when governments become a "terror to the good," and "a praise to the evil," they cease to be legitimate by being destructive of the ends of their creation, and it becomes the right of the people to abolish them, and to institute in their place such new governments as shall seem most likely to effect their safety and happiness.

For, acting upon these principles, consecrated by the Holy Scriptures, and sealed with the blood of our fathers, the tyrant at Washington, who has usurped all the powers of government, has denounced us as *Rebels*, and has invaded our soil with a grand army, to coerce us into submission. Judgment has been pronounced, and he is proceeding to execute the sentence by burning our houses, desolating our fields, confiscating our property, imprisoning and murdering our people. He has made an idol of the Union, and constituted himself its High Priest, inspiring its oracular responses. While the people of the North fall down and worship this idol, we of the South are to be trampled under the feet or crushed in the embraces of the political Juggernaut.

The dishonoring word, rebellion, has been used to brand some of the holiest causes and to stain some of the purest names that ever illustrated the pages of history. Of this, my text furnishes the earliest example. A proud King of Assyria had invaded the territories of a pious King of Israel with a "grand army." His advent was heralded by commissioners who were instructed to say to Hezekiah—"Thus saith the great King, the King of Assyria, what confidence is this wherein thou trustest? Thou sayest, (but they are but vain words,) I have counsel and strength for the war. Now on whom dost thou trust, that thou *rebellest* against me?" Harken not to Hezekiah when he persuadeth you, saying, "the Lord will deliver us." When Hezekiah heard this message, he rent his clothes, and spread it before the Lord, saying, "Oh, Lord God of Israel, which dwellest between the cherubim, thou art the God of all the kingdoms of the earth. Open, Lord, thine eyes and see; bow down thine ear and hear the words of Sennacherib, which reproach the living God. Now, therefore, oh Lord our God, we beseech thee save us out of his hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that thou art God, even thou only." God answered this prayer by the mouth of the prophet Isaiah, saying, "Be not afraid of the words which thou hast heard; I will send a blast upon him, and he shall hear a rumor and return to his own land, and I will cause him to fall by the sword in his own land. And it came to pass that night, that the angel of the Lord went out and smote in the camp of Assyria one hundred and eighty-five thousand men." So the King of Assyria returned to Nineveh, and as he was worshipping in the house of his idol, his sons smote him with the sword. Such was the fate of the first tyrant who ever branded a holy cause with the dishonoring name of *rebellion*.

The American Revolution furnishes another example of the same truth. Our fathers were denounced as rebels, and yet, like Hezekiah, putting their trust in God, they accomplished a revolution which had no parallel in history, and laid the foundations of governments which had no model on the face of the globe. They fired a train which has been exploding ever since, overturning many a hoary despotism, and which is destined to illuminate, more or less, every kingdom and people; but the people of the North having repudiated these principles, and being about to put out the light which our ancestors kindled upon this continent, we of the South are summoned by Providence to make a great struggle to keep alive upon our altars those fires which, if now extinguished, may never be re-illumed on earth. - If this be rebellion, it is

rebellion like that which breathed in the prayers of the pious Hezekiah, like that which flowed in streams of living flame from the lips of Patriek Henry, and which encircled with an undying wreath the brow of Washington, "who had the all-cloudless glory to free his country."

And if we, like the pious King of Israel, and our Washington and Henry's, humble ourselves before God, and implore his alliance, we shall be successful in establishing our independence. Our boasting enemies rely upon their overshadowing numbers and the long range of their artillery. They taunt us with the saying of Napoleon, that the "Lord is always on the side of the strongest battalions." We reply, in the language of Holy Scripture, that "the race is not always to the swift, nor the battle to the strong." If need be, we will raze every house, burn every blade of grass, fortify every rock, retire to our mountains and caves, and the last intrenchment of independence shall be our grave.

I said in the beginning that the public mind was absorbed by these thoughts. I now say that there is danger lest we be so absorbed by them as to forget our allegiance to the "King of Kings, and Lord of Lords." Whilst we may differ in opinion upon questions of political *sovereignty* and *allegiance*, and about measures of *coercion* and *conciliation*, there can be no doubt about our allegiance to that Great Sovereign of whose throne in Heaven this earth is but the footstool. It is he that hath made us. In him we live, and move, and have our being. Upon him we depend for every breath that we draw, and for every pulse that beats. He feeds, clothes, and crowns us every day with loving kindness and tender mercies. And yet, instead of acknowledging him in all our ways, and loving him with all our hearts, our ingratitude wrings from him the touching exclamation—"Wonder, oh Heavens, and be astonished earth: I have nourished and brought up children, and they have *rebelled* against me. The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib; but Israel doth not know—my people will not consider."

However we may resent the imputation of being rebels against the Federal Government, we are unquestionably guilty of rebellion against God; and never was rebellion so unprovoked, and which so richly merited the sternest measures of *coercion*. He might have invaded the earth with legions of angels; He might have blasted it with lightnings, shaken it to pieces with earthquakes, depopulated it with famine and pestilence, or burned it with fire. But instead of measures of *coercion*,

he devised a method of conciliation which was the astonishment of men and angels. The Sovereign put off his crown and came down from his throne in the form of his rebellious servants upon an embassy of peace. His advent was heralded by a star and announced by an angel in the words, "Behold, I bring you glad tidings of great joy; unto you is born this day, in the city of David, a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord. And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the Heavenly Host, praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the Highest; on earth, *peace, good will, towards men*. His life among men was a series of miracles of merey. He opened the eyes of the blind to the beauties, and the ears of the deaf to the minstrelsy of Nature. He unlocked the mouth of the dumb, and let his caged thoughts fly out on the wings of song; and to the lame he gave the luxury of leaping like the hart. In the fountain of his heart there never bubbled up one impure thought; in his single eye there was not one single mote; from his sweet lips there never flowed one unkind word. At one moment he "commanded the elements like a God;" at the next, he melted in tears of human sympathy like a woman. Although the world was made by him, he had not where to lay his head. As he went about doing good, he was insulted and mocked. In the midst of his sinless and sublime career of benevolence, he was arrested by the thankless objects of his charity. With twelve legions of angels at his command, he permitted himself to be mocked, smitten, scourged, spit upon, and led like a "lamb to the slaughter." He was nailed to the cross. He suffered agony so extreme that his blood vessels burst, and his whole frame was covered with drops of blood. With the burden of the sins of a rebellious world upon him, he hung there a voluntary martyr, the blood flowing drop by drop, until he expired. By this wonderful expedient, all the ends which would have been answered by the incarceration of all the rebellious race of man in the cells of perdition, have been effected. If the Sovereign of the universe had permitted our rebellion against his Divine Majesty to go unpunished, it would have betrayed a pitiful weakness, or a criminal indifference to principle, which would have been followed by universal anarchy and the demoralization and ruin of all his subjects. If he had vindicated his authority by the eternal destruction of the rebels, it would have been an awful exhibition of his abhorrence of sin, and his determination to punish it. But when, rejecting both these methods, he adopted the plan of manifesting himself in the flesh, and bearing our sins in

his own body on the cross, he gave a more impressive proof of his respect for law, and of his purpose to vindicate its violated majesty, than if he had shut up the whole race of rebels in hell. But this was not the only effect of his scheme. It laid open to the eyes of the ungrateful rebel the heart of his Sovereign. Coercion hardens the heart. Conciliation softens it. And when the rebellious sinner sees all the forms of terror and the ministers of justice that had been haunting his guilty conscience meet and melt into "a form of love dying for his rescue," his heart of stone relents; he is subdued, not by power, but by love. In his Sovereign he recognizes his father, and throwing down the weapons of his rebellion, he cries, "Father, I have sinned against Heaven and before Thee, and am not worthy to be called Thy son." Thus at the cross do "mercy and truth meet together—righteousness and peace kiss each other."

Fellow soldiers, the enemies of our country are not our only enemies; they can only kill the body. But our bodies, upon whose nurture and adorning we spend so much time and so much money, are not all of us. There is a mysterious principle within us, of which the body is but the tabernacle. This principle is the soul, and the soul has its enemies. These enemies are not flesh and blood, but spiritual principalities, powers, and rulers of the darkness of the world. Of these enemies the Devil is commander-in-chief, who goes about sometimes as a "roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour," and sometimes in the seducing garb of "an angel of light." His aids and allies are the world and the flesh. The earth is the theatre of a grand contest between these opposing forces, and every human heart is a battle-field, on which victories are sometimes won more glorious than any that are painted on the pages of the historian. In the 7th chapter of the Epistle to the Romans, St. Paul has drawn a graphic picture of the battles of which the human heart is often the scene, which drew from one of the combatants the affecting cry, "Wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from this body of death?" followed by the exultant shout, "Thanks be to God, who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." In this warfare, "carnal" weapons are of no avail. But the Divine Government has not left us defenceless. Its supplies never fail. It provides a complete suit of perfect armor for all its soldiers. The armor of God consists of sandals for the feet, "girdles of truth for the loins," swords of the spirit and shields of faith for the hands, breastplates of righteousness, and helmets of hope for the

head. Clothed in this armor, you will be able to stand against "the wiles of the Devil," and to "quench all the fiery darts of the wicked."

Fellow soldiers, as a recruiting officer of the great Captain of our salvation, I come to enlist soldiers for this war. To this end I unroll before your eyes the "banner of the cross," the one-starred flag—the flag of Bethlehem—and call for volunteers. God never drafts; he will accept none but volunteers. Will you, who responded so promptly to the call of your country, and prefer death to subjugation by a civil tyrant, refuse to rally round the banner of the cross, and battle for freedom from the bondage of Satan. "Thinkest thou there is no tyranny but that of blood and tears?" The despotism of sin, the weakness and the wickedness of vice, produce ten thousand tyrants whose delegated cruelty surpasses the worst act of any civil tyrant.

Oh, why is it that an enterprise of patriotism presents itself to your imaginations, beaming with so much beauty and so touches your hearts, when a mission of mercy, like that of Christ to this rebellious earth, awakens no emotion?

Soldiers of Christ arise,
 And put your armor on :
 Strong in the strength which God supplies,
 Thro' His eternal Son.
 Strong in the Lord of Hosts,
 And in His mighty power,
 Who in the strength of Jesus trusts,
 Is more than conqueror.

Stand, then, in His great might,
 With all His strength endued,
 And take to arm you for the fight
 The panoply of God.
 That having all things done,
 And all your conflicts past,
 You may behold your victory won,
 And stand complete at last.

My times are in thy hand, Psalm xxxi. 15.

- 1 SOVEREIGN Ruler of the skies!
Ever gracious, every wise!
All my times are in thy hands—
All events at thy command.
- 2 Times of sickness, times of health;
Times of penury and wealth;
Times of trial and of grief;
Times of triumph and relief;
- 3 Times the tempter's power to prove,
Times to taste a Saviour's love;
All must come, and last, and end,
As shall please my heavenly Friend.
- 4 Plagues and deaths around me fly;
Till he bids I cannot die;
Not a single shaft can hit,
Till the God of love sees fit.
- 5 O thou gracious, wise and just,
In thy hands my life I trust;
Have I somewhat dearer still?
I resign it to thy will.
- 6 Thee, at all times, will I bless;
Having thee I all possess;
I can ne'er be bereaved be,
Since I cannot part with thee.

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